

# What does “Aging Well” mean?



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# Background

- ▶ Gerontologists debate the factors which lead to aging well
- ▶ Many concepts have been studied over the last half of the twentieth century
- ▶ Early research on aging reflected the concern with adapting to the physical, psychological, and social losses of aging
- ▶ Subjective and objective aspects of aging well are important in our discussion of successful aging
- ▶ Research claims that 85% of older adults are satisfied with their lives/aging
  - ▶ Levels of life satisfaction tend to be stable over time.
- ▶ Life satisfaction is strongly related to health, socioeconomic status and relationships with family and friends

- ▶ Scientists have verified the wide diversity within populations and have taken different focuses to study successful aging:
  - ▶ Some suggested that personal goals lead an individual from one stage to another
  - ▶ Others measured actual ability to function or perform
  - ▶ Some examined successful aging with an emphasis on adding meaning or richness
  - ▶ Still others explored the idea of control or power over one's course of life
  - ▶ Other psychological approaches suggested coping, choice and adapting as predictors of success
- ▶ Other scientists examined how the environment affects our "well being" and how we perceived the experiences of our lives
  - ▶ They created ways to measure "life satisfaction" and the "quality of life"



# Definitions for aging well

# Variety of concepts

- ▶ It has been concerned that the term “successful” implied a contest where there are winners and losers, and some began to suggest alternative terms:
  - ▶ Healthy aging
  - ▶ Aging well
  - ▶ Effective aging
  - ▶ Productive aging
- ▶ Yet the successful aging has remained the umbrella term



# Successful aging

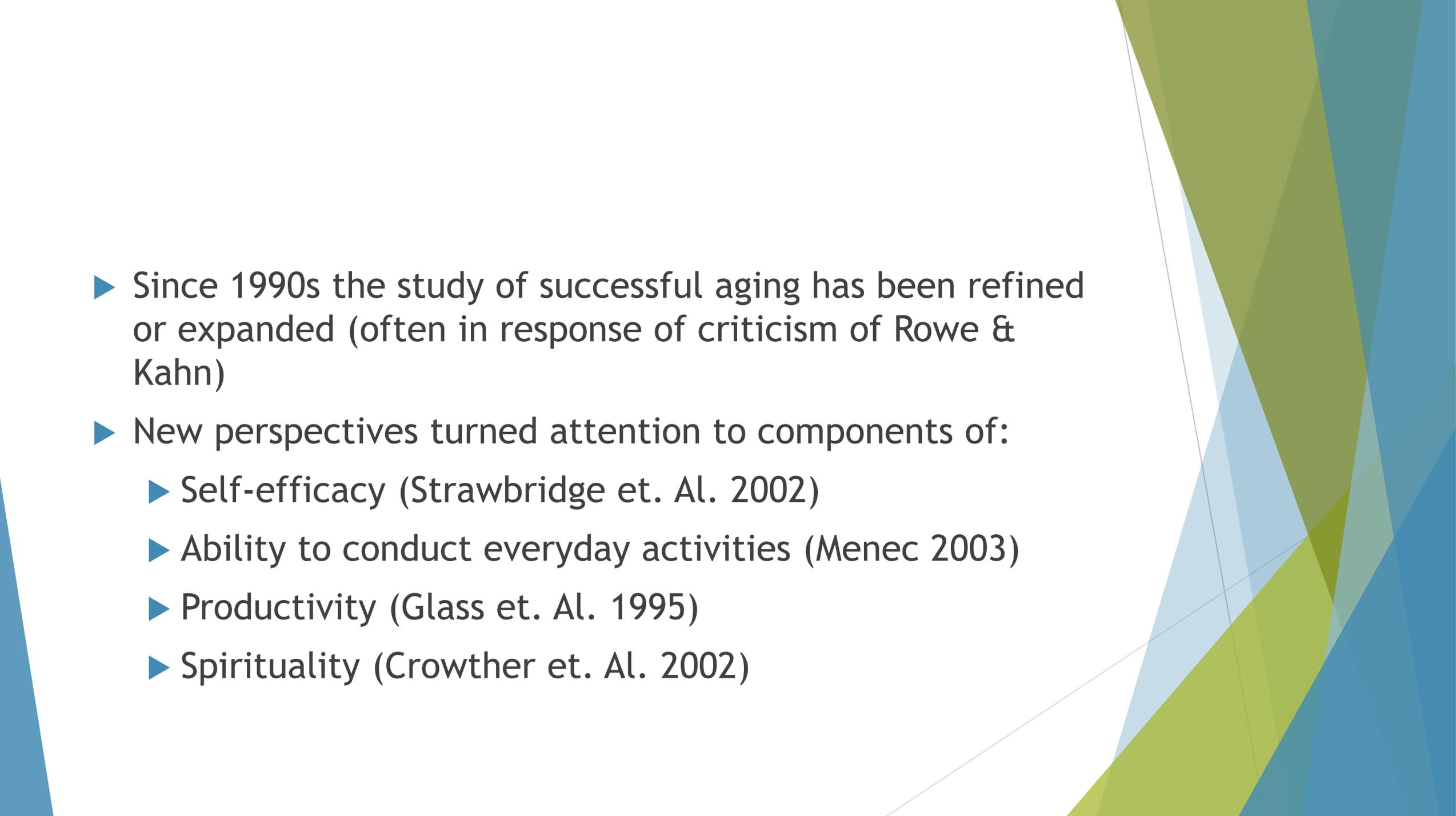
- ▶ The most common term used to indicate positive old age
- ▶ Success has been defined as survival, lack of disability, life satisfaction, social engagement, productivity, quality of life, and the absence of disease
- ▶ Discussions about what constitutes successful aging have been ongoing in gerontology since 1950 and 1960
- ▶ Most of the successful aging definitions have defined (i.e. Baltes & Baltes) it as a outcome -some have emphasized processes

# Successful aging by Havighurst (1961)

- ▶ Envisioned the successful aging as the maintenance as far and as long as possible of the activities and attitudes of middle age.

# Successful aging by Rowe & Kahn (1986/1996)

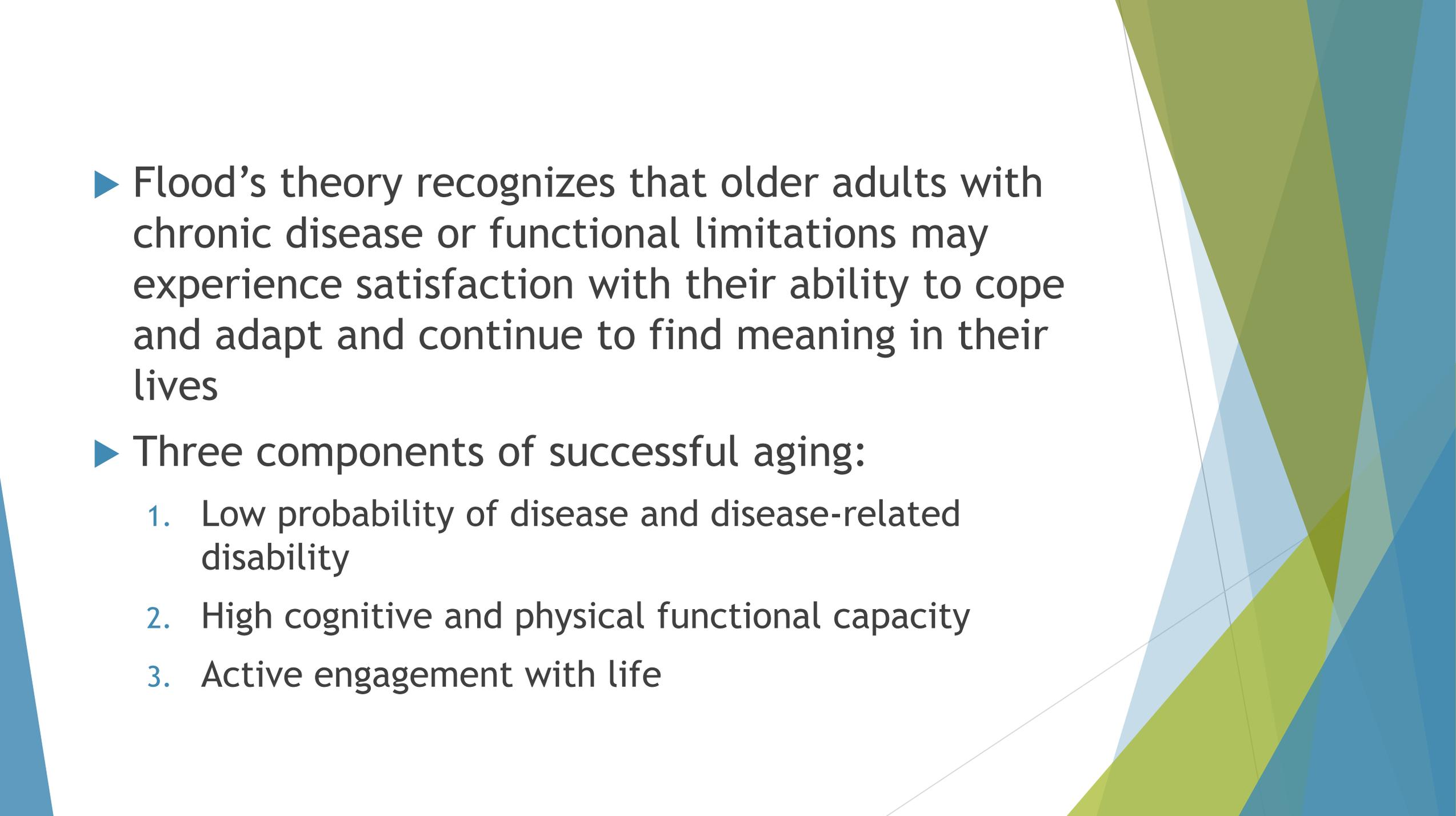
- ▶ Current use of the term arose from the multidisciplinary *MacArthur Study of Successful Aging* by Rowe and Kahn from 1986 to 1996
- ▶ They showed that the **lifestyle** was as significant as genetics in determining health in later life

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- ▶ Since 1990s the study of successful aging has been refined or expanded (often in response of criticism of Rowe & Kahn)
  - ▶ New perspectives turned attention to components of:
    - ▶ Self-efficacy (Strawbridge et. Al. 2002)
    - ▶ Ability to conduct everyday activities (Menec 2003)
    - ▶ Productivity (Glass et. Al. 1995)
    - ▶ Spirituality (Crowther et. Al. 2002)

# Successful aging by Flood (2005)

- ▶ Flood focuses on the individual perspective, encompassing physical, functional and psychosocial health while adding the existential/spiritual domain
- ▶ Based on concept analysis:

*Successful aging can be defined as the individual's perceived satisfaction in adapting to the physical and functional changes of ageing, while experiencing connectedness and a sense of meaning/purpose in life (Flood 2005, p. 34)*

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- ▶ Flood's theory recognizes that older adults with chronic disease or functional limitations may experience satisfaction with their ability to cope and adapt and continue to find meaning in their lives
  - ▶ Three components of successful aging:
    1. Low probability of disease and disease-related disability
    2. High cognitive and physical functional capacity
    3. Active engagement with life

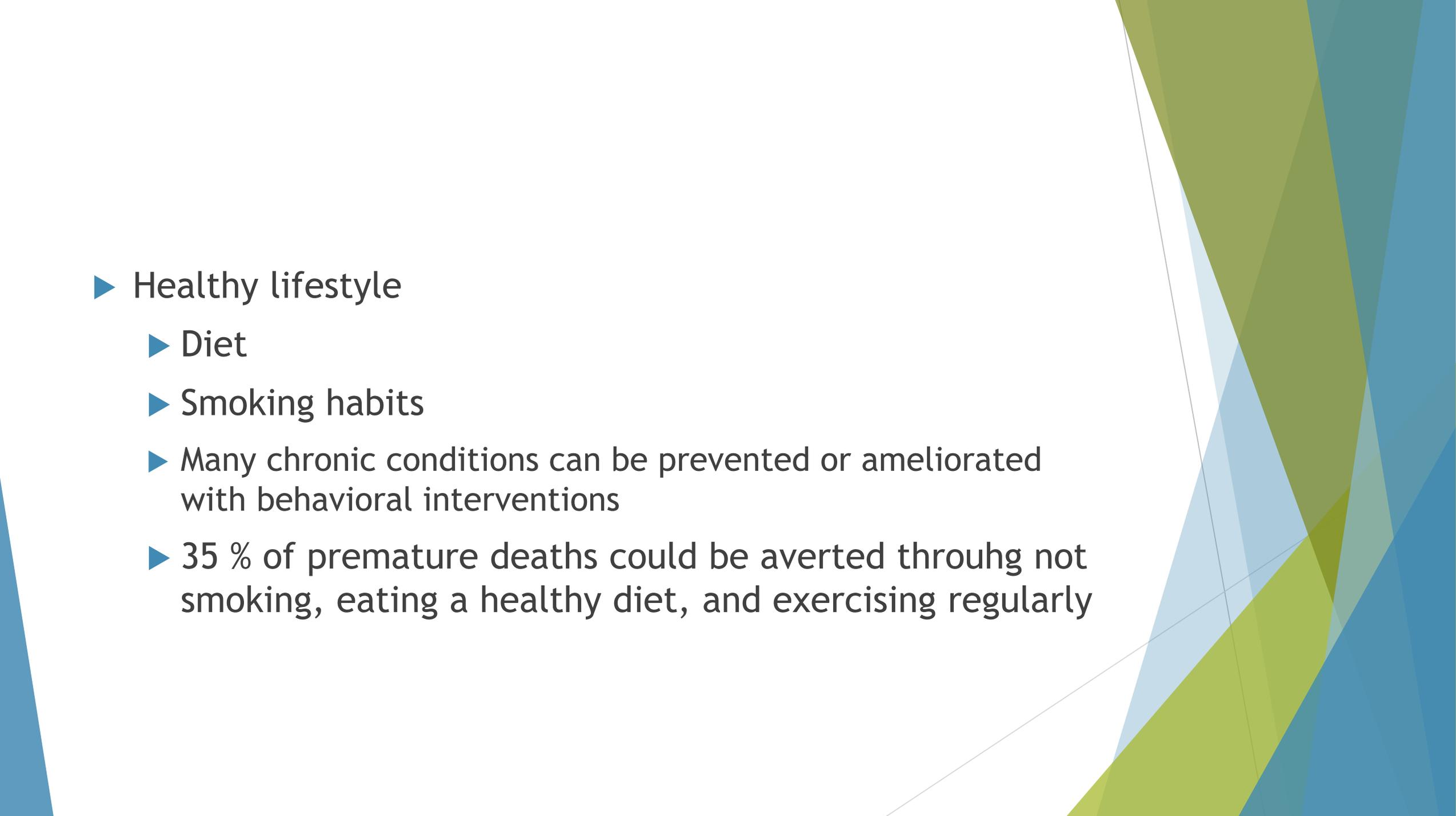
# Factors associating with successful aging

Number of factors are associated with successful aging:

- ▶ Multiple chronic conditions impact negatively for quality of life
- ▶ Functional health, ability to perform both basic and more advanced activities of daily living (ADLs) declines with aging
  - ▶ In some studies 42 % of people over 65 reported a functional limitation

# Positive correlation to successful aging

- ▶ Daily leisure activities
  - ▶ Travel, cultural activities, social activities and sports > higher life satisfaction



- ▶ Healthy lifestyle

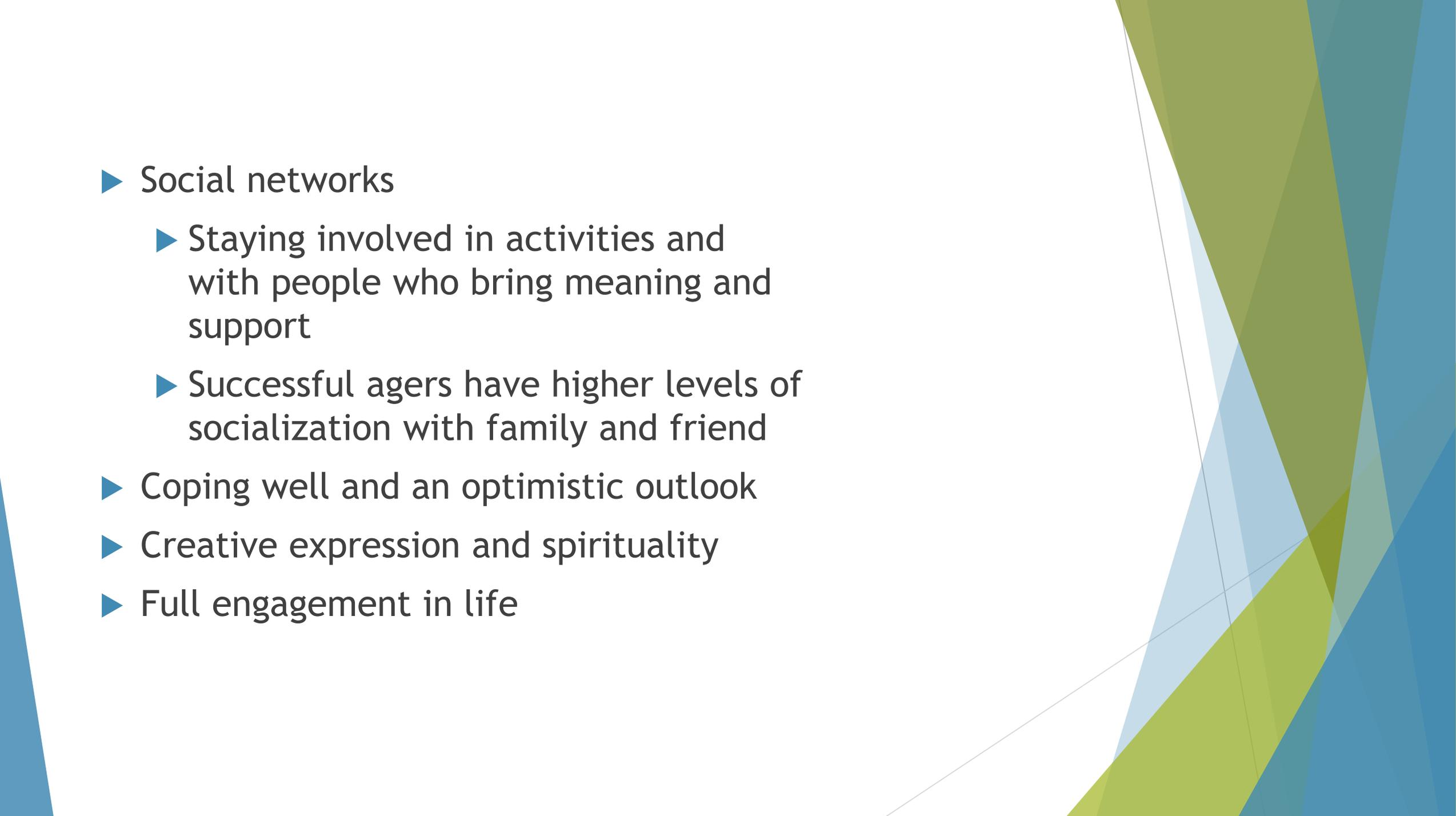
- ▶ Diet

- ▶ Smoking habits

- ▶ Many chronic conditions can be prevented or ameliorated with behavioral interventions

- ▶ 35 % of premature deaths could be averted through not smoking, eating a healthy diet, and exercising regularly

- ▶ Exercise /A physically active lifestyle is a key contributor to aging well
  - ▶ Physically active older adults are more than twice as likely to be rated as aging well
  - ▶ There are several studies showing that interventions based on physical activity have an impact to aging well
  - ▶ Successful agers have higher levels of physical and cognitive activities

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- ▶ Social networks
    - ▶ Staying involved in activities and with people who bring meaning and support
    - ▶ Successful agers have higher levels of socialization with family and friend
  - ▶ Coping well and an optimistic outlook
  - ▶ Creative expression and spirituality
  - ▶ Full engagement in life

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- ▶ Personality traits have been associated with important outcomes related to successful aging
    - ▶ Responsibility, self-control, traditionalism are consistent predictors of longevity

# Not highly relevant correlation for successful aging or there is disharmonious results

- ▶ Marital status
- ▶ Ethnicity
- ▶ Income
- ▶ Education

# Conclusion

- ▶ Successful aging is a multidimensional concept and include physical, psychological, functional and social health in the definition
- ▶ And yet there is no universally shared definitions
- ▶ However, there is a general consensus that successful aging includes freedom from chronic disease ad the ability to continue to function effectively, both physically and mentally, in old age.

# How to measure successful aging?

- ▶ Subjective measures of successful aging have been found to be associated with various measures of well-being, life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, mental health etc.
- ▶ Universal method for measuring or assessing successful aging has not been accepted
- ▶ When comparing researchers' and older adults' views about self-reported successful aging (Montross et. Al. 2006):
  - ▶ 92 % of the older adults self reported successful aging
  - ▶ Only 5 % met researchers' criteria for successful aging

# The wellness profile OldWellactive (OW)

- ▶ The wellness profile OW is an instrument that was originally developed as a tool for home visits aimed to evaluate and promote wellbeing among the home-living older people in the City of Oulu.

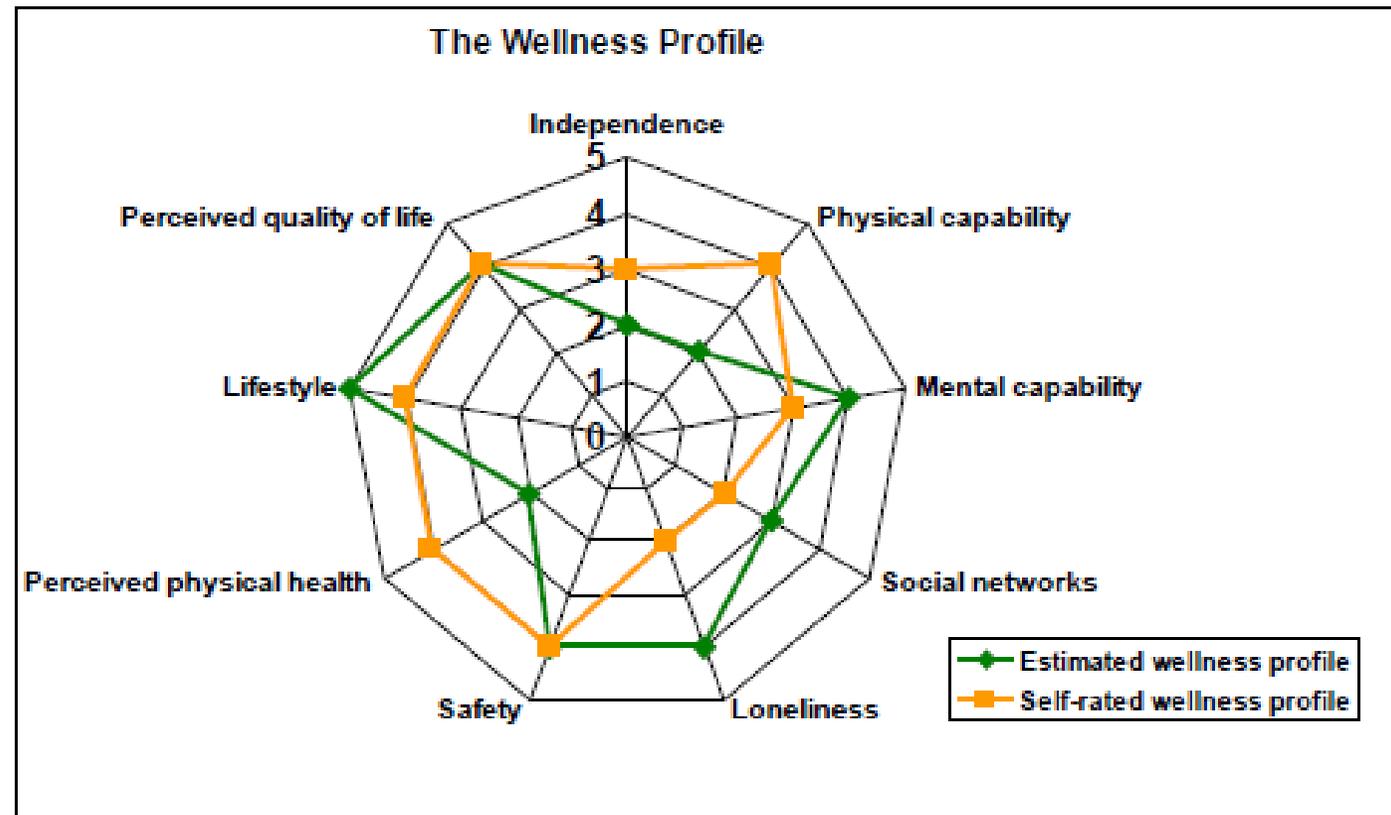
# SELF-RATED WELLNESS PROFILE

- ▶ Total 79 questions
- ▶ The total score in each domain is classified into five categories (1=very good situation - 5=very bad situation)
- ▶ When assessing the wellbeing of the elderly, their **own experience** is worth its weight in gold:
  - ▶ The first question in each domain describes the elderly respondent's own experience of that particular dimension of wellbeing: a 'golden standard'.  
*“How well do you feel you cope with everyday activities ?”*
- ▶ Responses to these initial questions form the elderly person's wellness experience (self-rated wellness profile).

# Content of OW questionnaire

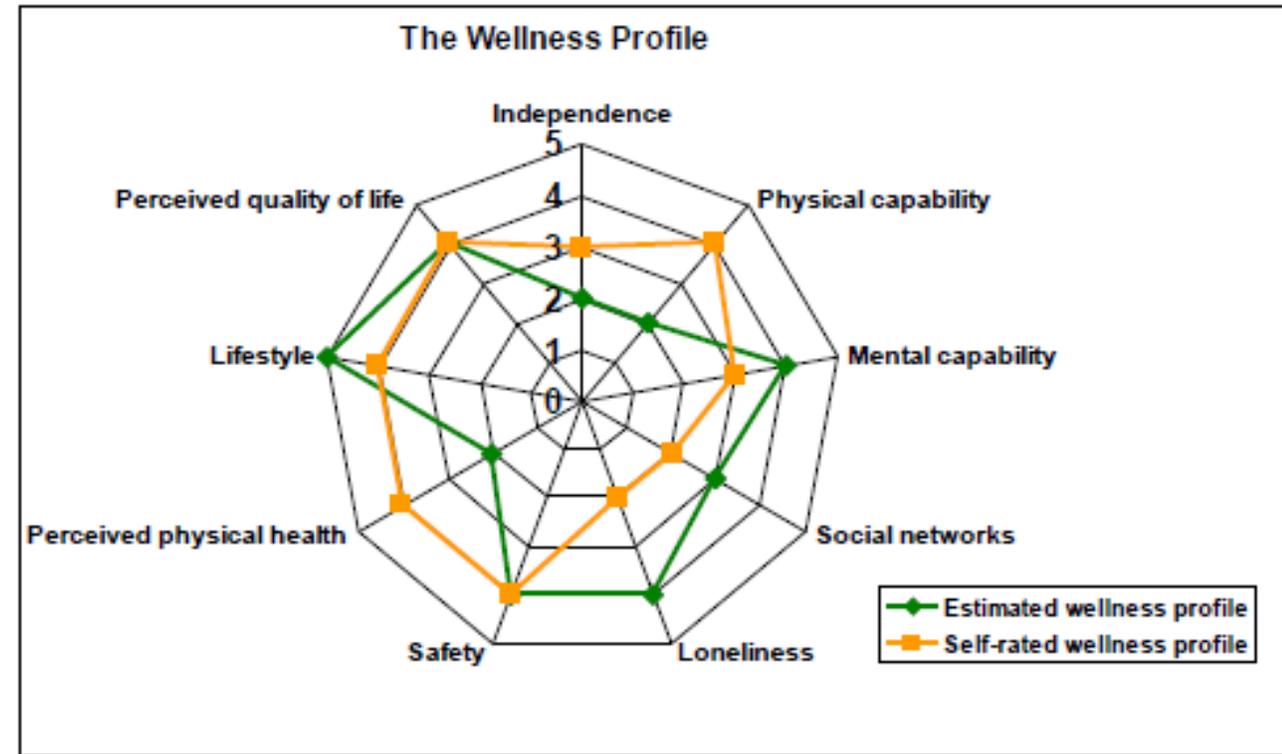
- ▶ The questionnaire consists of nine domains aimed to operationalize and assess the well-being of an older person living at home:

1. Independence
2. Physical capability
3. Mental capability
4. Perceived physical health
5. Social networks
6. Loneliness
7. Safety
8. Lifestyle
9. Perceived quality of life



# ESTIMATED WELLNESS PROFILE

- ▶ The other questions in each of the domains are basically indicators from earlier studies on assessment of the current state of that dimension of wellbeing.
- ▶ Responses to those questions form the **external estimate of an older person's wellbeing** (estimated wellness profile).



- ▶ External-estimated wellbeing includes i.e. physical capacity tests, i.e., grip strength test (Jamar grip strength meter) and chair stand test.

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- ▶ Nowadays there is more holistic view of health and successful aging, calling attention to social and environmental factors such as:
    - ▶ Adequate income
    - ▶ Access to health care
    - ▶ Safe neighborhoods
    - ▶ Availability of aging services

# Environment and aging well

- ▶ In the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in the role of the environment as a factor contributing to well-being and aging well among the elderly
- ▶ Environmental influences for aging well range from the biological (i.e. longevity) to the psychological (i.e. optimism, resilience) to the social (i.e. interaction) elements
- ▶ The environment contributes to people's living conditions and subjective sense of health, illness, happiness and growth

- ▶ Interaction between individuals and the environment is a two-way process, where individuals' well-being is affected by factors in the environment, while they also have the capacity to modify different aspects of the environment to make them better suited to their needs.
  
- ▶ The environment and its relation to 'aging well' can be viewed with the aid of three aspects:
  1. Physical environment
  2. Social environment
  3. Symbolic environment

# Physical environment for supporting aging well

> Strong correlation to physical activity

# Definition of the physical environment

The physical environment is defined through physical space and structures:

- a. natural: such as natural environment or climate
- b. man-made: such as houses, streets, shops, services, parks, yards, noise, safety and a pleasant atmosphere

The barriers (for physical activity) that older adults cite most often are (Schutzer & Graves 2004):

- Unsatisfactory (unsafety) physical environment
- Poor sidewalks
- Lack of transportation to a recreational facility

- Cold and heat related symptoms, climate challenges to outdoor mobility and the mood and availability of services.

### 1. Northern environment



enables safe mobility

### 2. An environment that enables safe activity



Tidiness at home and in immediate surroundings, closeness to natural environment and opportunities for various activities

### 3. A pleasant physical environment



# For example a pleasant physical environment

- Has a strong correlation to mental wellbeing
- ▶ Tidiness at home and in its immediate surroundings
- ▶ Closeness to natural environment
- ▶ People living in a pleasant physical environment are more active

- ▶ The pleasant physical environment includes opportunities for various activities:
- ✓ Natural environment areas, such as parks and gardens, are popular meeting places (over 90% in all groups in my studies) that provide an opportunity to interact with other people.
- ✓ They are also popular among the elderly for exercise (89 %) and relaxation (89 %).



# Social environment for supporting aging well

# SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Challenge: Only ¼ of home dwelling elderly is getting regular care, so help is mainly received from relatives and friends. Support for family members?

Opportunities for various hobbies and activities close by are a significant factor of well-being among the elderly. Having meaningful activities at home, gardening and various hobbies help them keep in good spirits.



1. Receiving help

2. Keeping in contact with family members



3. Friends as providers of support to wellbeing

4. A pleasant living community



Social support appears to have a direct association with health outcomes (Parslow et. Al. 2011)

The barriers for physical activity is often a lack of social support (Schutzer & Graves 2004)

# Social environment and aging well

- ▶ Activity participation has been linked to older adults' successful aging (i.e. Carlson et. Al 1998, Knight & Ricciardelli 2003, Wicks 2006)
- ▶ Staying productive is associated with well-being and successful aging (Hao 2008)
- ▶ Hard work leisure participation is related to successful aging (Menec 2003)

- ▶ Older adults with satisfying personal connections live longer and report improved physical health, and cognitive functioning (Chodosh et. al. 2007, Seeman et. Al. 2001)
- ▶ Individuals who have higher levels of social support are distinguished as aging successfully compared to their counterparts (Pruchno et. Al. 2010)
- ▶ Families who report higher levels of social support demonstrate higher levels of cohesion and are better able to adjust and adapt to challenges
- ▶ Adults who feel useful to friends and family report a decrease in disability and tend to live longer than those who rarely feel useful for others (Gruanewald et. Al. 2007)

# Symbolic environment for supporting aging well

Unlike the physical and social environment, the symbolic environment does not have a concrete form; it is only present in the thoughts of the elderly and expressed through the use of language

# Symbolic environment and successful aging

- ▶ There appears to be a positive correlation between spirituality/religiously and successful aging (Blazer 2006, Contanzo et. Al. 2009, Martin et. Al. 2015)
- ▶ Consists of:
  - ▶ Spirituality
  - ▶ Ideal attributes of well-being
  - ▶ Normative attributes of well-being
  - ▶ Sense of history

Juvani et. al. 2006, Elo 2006, Elo et. al. 2011, Elo et. al. 2013

# Spirituality

- ▶ Perception of *spirituality* is a key factor contributing to well-being among the elderly.
  - ▶ Religious faith, prayer and taking part in church activities give the elderly strength that helps them cope.
  - ▶ There are spiritual elements associated with natural environments, such as forests, because of their reviving, refreshing qualities and the sense of freedom, happiness and harmony that they offer.



# Ideal attributes of well-being

- ▶ Ideal attributes consist of ideas, values, and knowledge
- ▶ The feeling of safety as such, as the environment should be a safe place both physically and psychologically
- ▶ Feeling safe is one of the attributes of a good living environment, which is closely linked to the perception of the community in an area:
  - ▶ Perception of the living community as a safe place is related to familiar people and helpful neighbors.
- ▶ Threats to the ideal attributes of well-being include various fears stemming from the environment, such as going out alone at night or being tricked by door-to-door salesmen.

The barriers (for physical activity) that older adults cite most often are (Schutzer & Graves 2004):

- Fear of injury
- Lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the need for increased activity

# The normative attributes of well-being

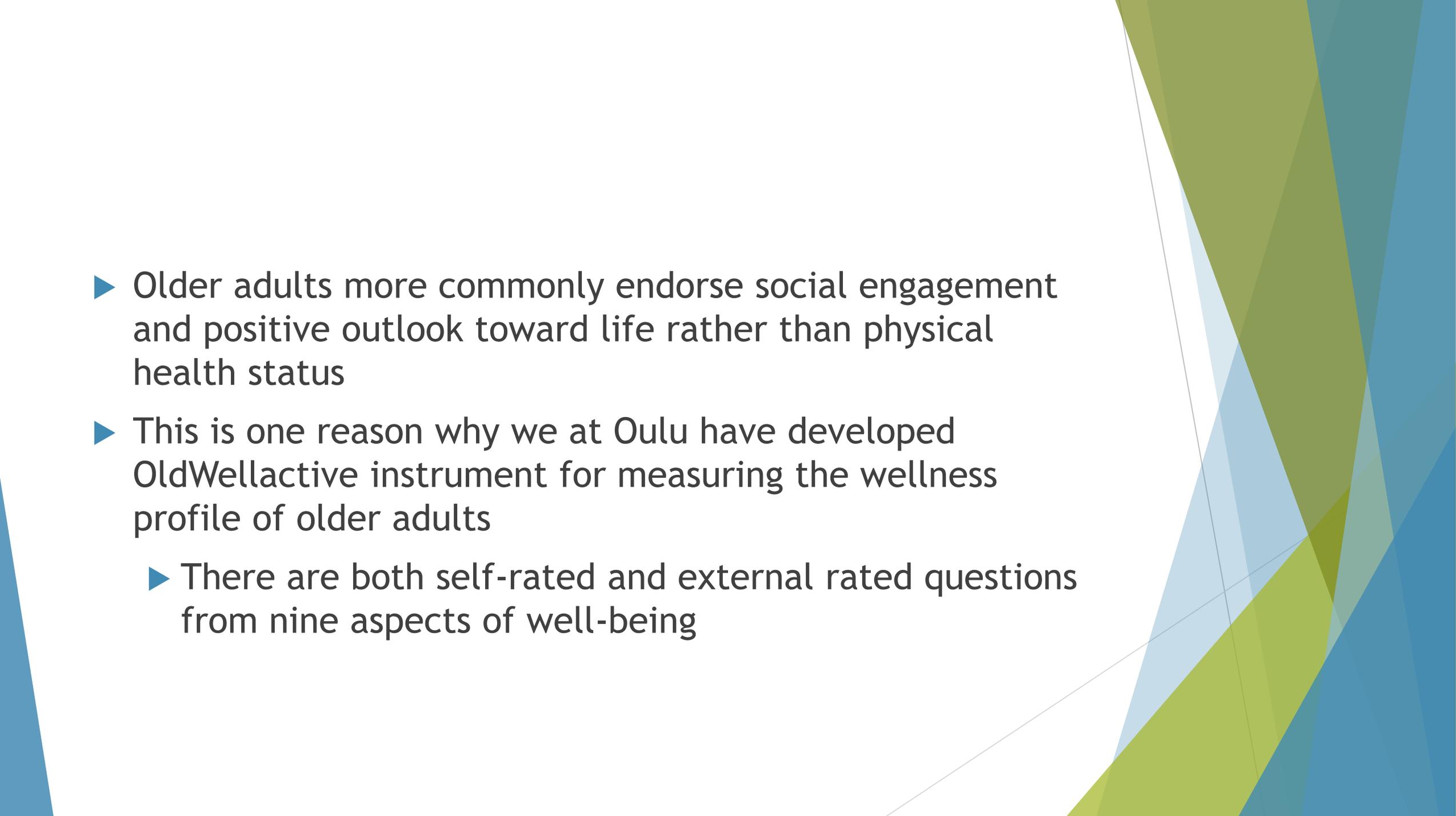
- ▶ Normative attributes refer to written and unwritten rules, laws, expectations and sanctions.
- ▶ The sense of freedom related to home and living surroundings, privacy and factors that restrict life.
- ▶ The sense of freedom consists of various physical properties, such as home, garden and natural environment.
- ▶ The sense of freedom is also connected to being liberated from social pressure and the freedom to be oneself.

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- ▶ Factors restricting life include having an illness or having a spouse suffering from an illness and the treatment related to this, and environmental limitations constructed as mental images.
    - ▶ In addition, the weakened health of a spouse may keep the elderly at home and reduce interaction with other people.

# A sense of history

- ▶ Has a very strong presence in the experiences the elderly have of their environment - Contributes to mental well-being
- ▶ Pleasant memories provide comfort in difficult times, and keepsakes around the house contribute to a sense of dwelling comfort.

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- ▶ Dwelling history, comprising long-term dwelling in the same house and in the same area, contributes to the level of attachment to the living surroundings.
    - ▶ Living in the same house for a long time also increases a sense of freedom as experienced by the elderly.
    - ▶ Challenge: how to support when older people are moving in a different living area?

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- ▶ Older adults more commonly endorse social engagement and positive outlook toward life rather than physical health status
  - ▶ This is one reason why we at Oulu have developed OldWellactive instrument for measuring the wellness profile of older adults
    - ▶ There are both self-rated and external rated questions from nine aspects of well-being

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**Thank you!**